



D. Y. PATIL
EDUCATION SOCIETY
INSTITUTION DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR

VASU MONKEY STORIES



Author

Prof. S. Mohan Karuppayil

Vasu Monkey Stories

Dr. S. Mohan Karuppayil

Professor and Head,
Department of Medical Biotechnology and Stem Cell
and Regenerative Medicine,
Centre for Interdisciplinary Research,
D. Y. Patil Education Society (Deemed University), Kolhapur - 416 006. Maharashtra.

Copyright & Published by
The Registrar,
D. Y. Patil Education Society,
(Institution Deemed to be University)
Kolhapur

PREFACE

This collection of small stories is meant to introduce the fascinating world of animals to children. The central character in most of the stories is a tiny monkey called Vasu. Attempt is made to provide little bit scientific background of the animals. These stories were told almost twenty years ago as bed time stories to my son, Ajit, when he was very little. Later these stories were told to many other children and they enjoyed listening to them. The author, Prof. S. Mohan Karuppayil is Professor and Head of the Department of Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine and Medical Biotechnology at DY Patil Education Society (Institution Deemed to be University), Kolhapur. The author is engaged in teaching biology to University students for the past two decades. His first book **Vasu Meets a Tadpole** is published by the National Book Trust, New Delhi and is translated to Chinese, Hindi, Telugu and Tamil. It is also being translated to various Indian languages. The author recommends the parents to read aloud these stories to their children.

S. Mohan Karuppayil

CONTENTS

1. Vasu and the Monkey God	6
2. Vasu Meets A Giraff.....	7
3. The Sea Horse Bride	9
4. Vasu Lights Fire.....	13
5. Vasu Meets a Rhino.....	14
6. Vasu Monkey Meets a Hairless Monkey.....	18
7. Vasu Monkey and the Mysterious Little Umbrella	19
8. Vasu Meets Fireflies.....	22

(1)

Vasu and the Monkey God

There was a hill near the house of Vasu. Beyond the hill was a village. One day Vasu and a friend went near the hill to play. The air carried the fragrance of jasmine and rose. There was a temple at the foot of the hill. The temple was frequented by the villagers, Vasu peeped in to the temple. The fragrance of camphor and flowers put a magic spell on him. **“Villagers are singing in praise of lord Rama”**. Vasu’s friend whispered. It was the first time Vasu was visiting a temple. Vasu decided to watch. He located a rock and comfortably sat on it watching the villagers. The fragrant air caressed him to sleep. Vasu woke up listening to synballs and bajans. There was a small croud in front of him. They had put a garland on his neck. An arati was being performed in front of him. They also lighted incense sticks in front of him. Some one broke a coconut and offered a piece of it to him. Vasu was a little bit afraid but sat motion less. Some body softly applied an orange color paste all over his body. It was ticklish. It is better to escape. He thought. It was getting dark. Slowly the villagers started leaving, to the great relief of Vasu. Once they left he started walking back to home. It was late when he reached home. **“Thief... Thief ...”** mama called out when she saw an orangy Vasu knocking at the door. **“ Mama it is me ”** Vasu yelled. He narrated what happened. **“Interesting”**. Papa said.**“It looks that they have mistaken you for the monkey god- the Hanumanji. Hanumanji was a great devotee of Lord Rama”**. **“It is a great honour to be mistaken for Hanumanji”**. Vasu felt. Any way it took a long time to remove the vermillion from his face. **“It is OK. I am happy that they did not hurt you”** -papa said. **“I want to know more about Rama and Hanuman”**, Vasu said. **“You need to read the epic Ramamyana which is the story of Rama and Seetha. This was written by the great poet Valmiki”**. Vasu shared the coconuts with mama and papa.

* * *

(2)

Vasu Meets A Giraff

Jakku, a little fox was on his way to his mamas place. He started from home early in the morning and had been walking the whole day long. He was hungry, thirsty and tired and decided to take a break. It was a forest. He sat under a tree. It was refreshing to drink some cold water. It was springtime. Butterflies were found kissing the wild flowers. He saw some puppies chasing the butterflies. Jakku enjoyed watching their play. The puppies noticed Jakku and came near him. They started sniffing at him. Once they knew that he was not bothered, they started pulling his leg and tail. Even though it was tickling, Jakku kept his cool and barked very softly to entertain the little puppies. Jakku was relieved that the dogs were not there and the puppies did not realize that he is a fox. The dogs used to call him cunning fox and used to avoid his company. Jakku continued his walk and reached a wine yard in a village. The evening sun was setting slowly and the beautiful bunches of grapes shined in the golden rays of the sun as if they were inviting Jakku for a feast. Jakku tried to pluck some of the bunches. He jumped at the grapes three four times but could not reach.

Obviously he was not a great jumper. He was tired and sat under the tree looking at the beautiful grapes. There was a monkey who was sitting on the tree and watching Jakkus futile attempts. The monkey exposed all of his teeth and giggled. Jakku just ignored him. But the monkey came near him told. You are not going to get it. Once your grandpa also came here and he also tried. He said. Then what happened ? Jakku was curious. Well, He jumped a couple of times and gave up, saying that these grapes are sour. I don't need it and walked away. The monkey once again showed his brown teeth and hopped away. Jakku expected that an understanding monkey might come and offer him a bunch of grapes. The monkeys were too busy pulling each other's the tails and quarrelling.

Jakku was upset and did not want to believe that story of the monkey. Grand pa

should not have lost his hope. He murmured little bit loudly. Young man what happened? Could I help? The question came from the sky? Jakku looked up and saw a happy tiny face munching on some tree leaves. He had a long neck like a snake's Jakku realized that the owner of the face and neck has four legs firmly foot on the earth.

Jakku was happy and said thank you. I am a Giraffe; the tall animal introduced himself and asked Jakku why he was sad. Jakku was ashamed of telling that he wanted to eat some grapes. He hesitatingly looked up at the bunches of grapes. The nice giraffe smiled and asked him whether he wanted those grapes. Jakku said yes. The giraffe had a hearty laugh. You would have asked me or some of the monkeys. He carefully picked up some of ripe bunches of grapes and presented it to Jakku. Please enjoy the grapes. The giraffe said. All the grapes are not sour. Don't loose hope easily. If you don't tell others what your dreams and desires are, how others will come to know about it. Do not hesitate to ask (politely). The good old giraffe advised Jakku. Jakku thanked the kind giraffe for the grapes and the great advise.

* * *

(3)

The Sea Horse Bride

Chetak, a horse, the son of Vayu is in need of a bride. The Equide (the scientific name of the Horse family) is on the run in search of a bride for Chetak who is employed in the police department. Chetak is now six years old. One may ask why so hurry? A horse can become an adult by the age of five years. The average life span of a horse is twenty five to thirty years. Chetek is a handsome horse. He weighs about 500 kilograms and is well trained in horse race. All the members of the family have joined the search. There are seven species in the Equide, including, the donkey and zebra. There are some reports of inter species marriages. For example, male donkey with a female horse, female donkey with a male horse, Zebra and horse. Mule, Hinny, Zorse, are the products of such marriages. However Vayu was not in favor of such marriages. But, Chetak was a different kind of a horse. He wanted to have a unique kind of a bride. He wanted to marry a sea horse. Chetak thought that it will be fun to have a sea horse as a wife. He may settle down on the beach and visit the under water world. The sea horses come in beautiful colors. He got inspired after seeing a mermaid movie on the TV. Vayu uncle is actually innocent of sea horses and mermaids. Since Chetak is a smart and intelligent horse, Vayu uncle decided to go as per his sons wish and put an advertisement in the **Daily Jungle** News Paper. In addition to this, he assigned this work to his childhood friend Jambu Monkey. Jambu Monkey happily agreed. One day he brought the good news: there is a sea horse family in the marine drive, in the Gulf of Mannar located in the Tamil Nadu State of India. There is a beautiful girl. She is the daughter of Mr. Hippocampus. Hippocampus is a sea horse. The Syngnathidae family (The sea horse family is called like that by the scientists) lives in a coral grove. Incidentally they are also in search of a groom for their beautiful daughter. Interesting, said Chetak. Uncle, could you please elaborate. Is the daughter of Mr. Hippocampus, beautiful and educated? He was eager. How is the family? I have not heard about them. Jambu uncle promised to get abck with more information.

As promised, after one week, Jambu uncle returned with more information. The Syngnathidae is a respectable family. Mr. Hippocampus gave birth to one hundred children last year. Mr. or Mrs. ? Vayu laughed and asked? I remember they said like that....Jambu uncle scratched his head and said. They have many relatives. Thirty-two species are there living in China, Indonesia in addition to India. They live in sea grass meadows , coral reefs, mangrove forests etc. Very gentle people. Are they vegetarians like us ? . Mrs. Vayu was curious. No, they eat tiny fishes, shrimps and tiny plants, Jambu Uncle clarified. That is OK, Mama . We will manage. Chetak said. Any way they have invited us for a small party next week. Jambu uncle said.

The Equidae family was fast to reach the abode of the Syngnathidae family. It was not hard to locate the marine drive . The house of the Syngnathidae family was located in a sea grass meadow in the shallow waters of the Gulf of Mannar. There was a poster put up which read Welcome to the Syngnathidae family. Another board read , Mr., Hippocampus in. Welcome, Welcome, a visibly surprised Mr. Hippocampus came out of the house. Please have a seat, he pointed to a clean rock, which was spruced up for the occasion. Please feel free at home. He said. Great people, Jambu uncle murmured while sitting. A brightly colored Mrs. Hippocampus appeared with a bowl of soup. This contains tiny water plants and its good. She assured the guests. Tastes good, Chetak acted polite. Chetak noticed that Mrs. Hippocampus lacked legs and hand. Poor thing, she is handicapped. Chetak said in a low voice. Excuse me. The guests have started coming. Please feel comfortable. This is the first time the land horses are visiting our family . We are proud. Let me tell our people. They should not be scared. Mrs. Hippocampus said apologetically and walked towards the door.

Jambu uncle smiled and said. Don't get panicky. Let us talk to these wonder full creations.

Hundreds of jubilant and bright sea horses walked in. They were taken aback to see the huge and mighty land horses. Friends, please welcome our guests. The mighty horses from the land. This is a historic moment, Mr. Hippocampus became

eloquent. The tiny sea horses, they were so tiny compared to the land horses, looked timidly with their teeny weeny eyes. They were all beautifully colored and moved around the shallow waters . They lacked legs but had a tail. Their faces were cute and resembled that of horses. They are sea horses. Amazing, Chetek whispered.

I wish they could be bigger and stronger like us. A surprised Jambu uncle could not withdraw his eyes. Mr. Hippocampus introduced his daughter, brother and their spouses. The younger brother came and greeted the guests followed by his wife. The beautiful pair performed a small dance. The brother of Mr. Hippocampus was a person with a fat belly. Chetak looked at his belly. The lady Hippocampus smiled and said , he is pregnant. Chetak repeated , he is pregnant ?Yes among sea horses, the dad has to take care of the babies. Male sea horses deliver the babies. Last year Mr. Hippocampus gave birth to one hundred babies. Right dear ? Mrs. Hippocampus asked. A shy Mr. Hippocampus nodded. You may notice that all the males in this group have baby pouches on their tummy for rearing children, she said. They are fishes! Jambu uncle yelled in surprise. Yes, we are fishes ! But we look like horses. That is why people call us sea horses. We envy you , land horses. You are all so strong and powerful. Mr. Hippocampus said. Let me introduce you to some of our friends. All the sea horses moved with their horse like heads upright. Chetak smiled and said, we horses, I mean land horses, do that only when we are excited. Mr. Hippocampus introduced all the thirty-two species of the Syngnathide family. Chetak tried to remember their names, Pygmy sea horse, Tiger tail sea horse, Giraffe sea horse, Bullock neck sea horse, Zebra sea horse...These are local names. . Their scientific names were little bit hard to remember for Chetek.

The whole crowd of sea horses were curious to know about their guests. I had been to china for a horse race. I have heard many stories about sea horses. Chetak said. Is it true that some of you, I mean the male sea horses , walk up to the land and marry attractive female land horses ? The sea horses had a hearty laugh. No they said in chorus. These are great stories. How is that possible? We are tiny fishes we only look like horses. You are so huge and strong. It is a beautiful and

wild imagination. Said the beautiful daughter of Mr. Hippocampus swaying her fins. Our dream of meeting the sea horses has finally come true. Said Chetek. It is great to know about the sea horses. I like your cute faces, beautiful colors and very graceful movements. Those of you who want a ride on my back are welcome. He said . The sea horses were happy to have a ride on Chetaks back in the shallow waters of the gulf of manner. It was a wonderful evening both for the land and sea horses. The Equide family said bye to the Syngnathide family.

* * *

(4)

Vasu Lights Fire

Vasu monkey – a little naughty monkey, lived in a dense rain forest with his grandpa, grandma and parents. It was a chilly December night. Vasu wanted to light a fire so that he could enjoy the warmth. He collected dried twigs of trees and made a heap. Now, how to light a fire? He noticed little specs of fire flying in the sky. Often it sat on the trees too. Using a net he collected all those tiny bits and sprinkled it all over the heap of dried leaves and twigs. He tried to fan it so that the twigs may catch fire. He fanned till his little face turned blue. But it was all in vain. A little bird who was dozing on the branch of a neighbouring tree was watching this. Finally having pity on Vasu she came down and told- **“Vasu, please try to understand that fire flies cannot start a fire”**. Vasu got annoyed and gave a blow to the little birdie. Poor little birdie. It was very painful. Vasu spent the whole night trying to light the fire but could not succeed. It was time for the sun to rise. He noticed a reddish color in the sky. What is going on ? It was becoming brighter and brighter. Finally it was so bright that Vasu could not even look at it. **“The sky is catching fire”** ! Cried out Vasu. All the animals in the forest came out of their hideouts to see the fire. **“What is the commotion Vasu”**?. Grandpa came out. He smiled when he heard about it. **“It is sunrise Vasu. It happens everyday in the eastern sky . It is not because of your fire flies. You need a match box to light a fire”**. Grandpa took out his match box and lighted the fire for Vasu . Vasu enjoyed watching the burning leaves. **“If do not know, please do not hesitate to ask Vasu”**. Grandpa said smilingly. **“There is nothing wrong in asking questions”**.

* * *

Vasu Meets a Rhino

It was a Sunday. Sunday is a cricket day for Vasu monkey. He set out in search of his friends. Ramu Buffalo, Buddhu Donkey, Waggy Tail Puddle Duck, Kali Crow, Spotty Dog and others. He reached the favorite spot of Ramu. As usual, Ramu was lazily lying in a pool of mud. Funny fellow! He looked like a lump of mud. Vasu wanted to play mischief on him. He picked up tiny rotten mangoes and started throwing at Ramu one by one, just to annoy him. Ramu ignored the first few. Finally he got up from his muddy pool and charged at Vasu at an amazingly fast pace. Vasu was quick to jump and catch a hanging twig of a mango tree. But this time he slipped and fell in the mud. Yucky! This was the first he is falling in mud. He tried to run. But Ramu was quick to follow him and catch .

Vasu stood panting. He was laughing and dripping mud. **OK come on, let's play cricket, big fellow.** Vasu said pulling the ear of Ramu. Ramu made some strange noise. What happened to this fellow? Did he catch cold? Vasu looked at him. To his surprise and shock he realized that it was not Ramu. It was a strange animal! He was grayish like Ramu. He had a huge body, and a horn right on his nose. He had a carpet like skin. As if somebody had covered his back with a thick carpet. Vasu was afraid that this animal might kill him with his dagger like horn any time. He started weeping and waited for the worst. The big animal did not attack but instead asked him. **Why you are crying?** Vasu said, **I am a little fellow and you are so huge. I thought that you might kill me with your big horn.**

No, Why should I? The big fellow said **I just want to play cricket with you. You are welcome.** Vasu said. **Come on, I will introduce you to my friends. But you have to promise me that you will not harm them.** The big animal promised so. Vasu introduced him self, while walking to the cricket ground. **I am Rhinoceros, Full name is *Rhinoceros unicornis*. I am an Indian Rhinoceros from Assam.** The big animal said. **I am sorry. Could you please repeat your name? It seems to be**

hard to pronounce. Vasu said. **It is not hard once you know the meaning.** The strange animal said. **It is a Greek name. Rhino means nose and ceros means Horn. The one with a horn on the nose.** The Strange animal explained. **How about unicornis?** Vasu asked. **Animal with a single horn.** The Rhinoceros said. A strange place to have a horn. Vasu thought. **Can I ask you one more question?** Vasu was wondering whether to ask it or not. But it may be better to know it. He thought. **You are welcome Vasu. Now we are friends and you may please ask.** The Rhinoceros was very polite. **Do you eat monkeys, Donkeys, buffalos, dogs, crows etc?** The Rhinoceros had a hearty laugh. **Are they your friends?** Rhino asked. **I will spare them.** He said. **Do you usually eat such animals?** Vasu repeated his question. **I was just joking Vasu. I am a vegetarian like you. I eat grasses, fruits and vegetables.** Rhino said while trying to shoo of an insect, which was sitting on his back. **Thank God!** Vasu was relieved. **Our cricket team is safe!** Vasu whispered.

All of Vasu's friends were waiting in the cricket ground ready to play. As usual there was plenty of food arranged for every body. Favorite food of all animals was there. Greens grass, palm leaves, wild roots, banana etc. Vasu's friends were intimidated to see the guest. Vasu introduced every body to Rhinoceros. Ramu buffalo was happy to share green grass and water with Rhinoceros. **Do you like mud bath?** He asked. **I just love it** Rhinoceros said. **I too.** Ramu said. Both of them started telling others about the advantages of mud bath. **It helps keeping away the insects.** Rhino said. We buffaloes were following that technique since time immemorial. Ramu started boasting. Kali Crow, who was sitting happily on the back of Ramu buffalo said, **Crow... Crow.** Rhino raised his head and looked. Kali Crow apologized for annoying him with her harsh voice. **In case you have any problem with tiny insects biting you, let me know.** She said munching on some ticks. **I usually help Ramu Buffalo and his family members eating away the ticks. Thanks.** Rhino said. Rhino looked at Ramu and said **you have big beautiful eyes. We Rhinoceros have very poor eyesight but our nose and ears are pretty good.** Vasu asked. **Are you comfortable here?** Vasu asked. **Now let me ask you one thing** Rhino said. **Do you monkeys kill Rhinoceros?** **No.** Vasu said. **Why should we? Our requirements are limited. We are mischievous but we don't kill any**

animals. We are happy with fruits, leaves and water. I was afraid of you Vasu. Rhinoceros confessed. **I thought that you are a human being and I was about to attack you. Thank god!** Vasu said. **Why are you afraid of humans?** Buddhu Donkey was curious. **That is a long story.** Rhinoceros said. **Humans have killed a good number of our forefathers, just for our horns. Some times, lions, tigers and Hyenas attack our baby Rhinos. See, now there are less than two thousand Rhinoceros in India. Only less than twelve thousand Rhinoceros are left in the whole world. If you people don't help one day we may disappear from this earth.** Tears started rolling down from the eyes of Rhinoceros.

Don't cry Mottu, Nothing of that sort will happen. Jambu uncle consoled him. **Can I touch your Horn?** He asked. Rhinoceros shook his head. **What is it made up of? Is it that you have only one or did you loose the second one?** Jambu uncle wanted to know. **It is made up of Keratin. I mean the same stuff you find in your hair, nail, the horns of buffalo, cows etc. The Rhinoceros found in India have only one horn and I am an Indian Rhinoceros. That is why Indian Rhinoceros are called *Rhinoceros unicornis*.** Rhinoceros was happy to answer. **Interesting. Are there Rhinoceros in other parts of the World also?** Jambu uncle continued. **Excuse me, I will be right back.** Rhinoceros went a little away from the cricket field and urinated near a tree and came back. **We dogs also do that to mark our territory,** Spotty Dog, who was keeping a distance came near and said friendly, wagging his tail.

Now coming back to your question on international Rhinoceros. Yes.

Various kinds of Rhinoceros popularly called as, White, Black, Sumatran, Javan, and Indian Rhinoceros are there. Rhinoceros are found in India, Nepal, Kenya, Indonesia, and Malaysia, Vietnam, South Africa, Angola, Switzerland. The Indian and Javan Rhinoceros have only one horn but others have two, one behind the other. An Indian Rhinoceros may weigh around Two Thousand kilograms. The white Rhinoceros are the heaviest. The white and black rhinos are not actually black or white; they are also gray like me, the Indian Rhinoceros said. **One personal question.** Buddhu Donkey broke his silence. **If you don't mind. How**

old are you? I am only fifteen. For your information, the average life span of Rhinoceros is fifty years. The Indian Rhinoceros said.

I am hungry. Vasu said, Lets have our food. Jambu uncle offered a big coconut for Rhinoceros. He broke the coconut using his big horn in a minute and offered it to all. Afterwards they happily played cricket.

* * *

Vasu Monkey Meets a Hairless Monkey

It was a holiday. Vasu, a little monkey boy and his parents went to a park. There were small crowds in front of the vendors of ice cream and panipuri. Little monkeys enjoyed somersaulting on the lush green lawns. They often pulled others tails leading to screams. It was getting dark. **“Let us go home”**. Papa monkey told Vasu. **“Vasu, collect your toys please”**. Said mama. Vasu collected and counted his toys. – One cricket bat, two balls... one is missing. While searching he noticed that there was a movement in the nearby bush. There it was. A little hairless monkey was playing there. Vasu was amazed. A hairless monkey!. He had a little head full of silky black hair but his face was clean. He had a tiny weeny nose, small ears and a pinky pink toothless mouth. He smiled a toothless smile at Vasu and threw the ball at him as an invitation for a play. Vasu really wanted to play with him . Before that mama called out for him. Since the little hairless one was alone Vasu decided to take him home on his back. No body noticed the little friend of Vasu. Vasu directly took him to his bed room because the little friend was fast asleep by the time they reached home. Vasu also had nice sleep. Vasu named him Pinku. Pinku was already playing when he woke up. **“Ouch”** said Vasu when Pinku pulled his tail. **“OK I will pull yours too”**. Said Vasu. What? Pinku was tail less. A hair less and tail less monkey!. He felt sorry for him. **“What is going on there? “Come down for breakfast”**. Mama entered the room and was astonished to see Pinku. **“Who is this Vasu “?** She asked with a surprise in her eyes. **“This is pinku mama”. The hairless and tail less monkey. He is my friend.** Vasu narrated how he got Pinku. **He is not a monkey Vasu. He is a *Homo sapien*.** I mean Human .. Said mama . **He is a human child. *Homo sapiens* is the scientific name for humans.** OK Vasu said **but I will call him Pinku only. Let us take him back to his home** . His mother may be worried. **“ Look what is in the news paper ”** papa read out. **“Child missing”**. A picture of toothless Pinku and his address was there . Vasu carried Pinku on his back to his home. Pinku’ s mama was very happy to get him back. She gave a bunch of bananas to Vasu. Pinku and Vasu became good friends.

* * *

(7)

Vasu Monkey and the Mysterious Little Umbrella

It was one of those clear days of the monsoon. It looks that rains have taken rest for a day. Sunrays were falling on the ground through the dark green canopy of the forest trees. Vasu was enjoying a walk through the forest path. Most of the birds and animals were also out enjoying the weather. The air was filled with the fragrance of wet leaves and soil. Often Vasu stopped to look at the new plants, which have sprung up after the rain. He saw a number of little animals and plants, which were not there before the monsoon season. He liked the rains because they bring out a variety of plants and little creatures. Vasu heard some one calling out for him. He looked down and noticed that it was a little umbrella near his feet.

Vasu sat near it and had a close look. Strange! It was white, fleshy and delicate. He noticed that there were many like it all over there. They were on rotten leaves or logs of woods or on the soil. It looked like a beach with umbrellas. This was the first time he was seeing white umbrellas. Usually umbrellas are black in color, Vasu thought. **Hello!** The little umbrella said in a feeble voice. **What kind of plant are you?** Vasu asked. **I am not a plant.** The little umbrella looked annoyed. **I am sorry. But you look like a plant. I am not green like the neem tree or jasmine plant.** Said the little umbrella. **Then are you an animal like me? I wish I had been. Then I would have taken a stroll through the forest like you.** Said the little umbrella sadly. **Actually I thought that you are a plant because you are attached to the ground** said Vasu apologetically. **That is OK. I am attached to this rotten log by a stuff called mycelia or hyphae, which are microscopic filamentous structures. They are not roots. I want to tell you that I am neither a plant nor an animal, little monkey. Call me Vasu.** Said Vasu monkey friendly. **Have a piece of banana.** Vasu offered. **Sorry friend, I can take only soluble nutrients, which we usually produce by rotting dead plants or animals. You may please leave it in the soil. We can not eat solid food like**

animals. Vasu noticed many little creatures sitting near and top of some of the umbrellas. A tiny toad as little as the toenail of Vasu was sitting on top of one of the little umbrellas. He was using it as stool. Vasu shooed him off. He took a giant leap and disappeared into the wild. **If you are not a plant or animal, then what are you?** Vasu was confused. **Is there any other kingdom other than that of plants or animals?** He was musing. The little umbrella was happy to answer. **I am a fungus.** He paused and said **we are fungi.** He was referring to the whole group of little umbrellas. **The fungal kingdom ! Are there many citizens in your kingdom? Are they all like you- all umbrellas? Where do you guys live? Can I meet more of your kind?** Vasu was curious. **We are ubiquitous Vasu. I mean we could be found everywhere. We are not all umbrella shaped. There is great diversity among us just like the diversity you see among the animals. We come in different shapes and colors. You may not notice many of us because many of our fellows are microscopic or very tiny and thus invisible to your naked eye. There are about 1.5 million of us in this universe. At least sixty-nine thousands of us are named and cataloged by the humans. Good ! You have a name too! Yes People call us mushrooms. There are different kinds among us. I am called *Agarics bisporus*. Agarics, can I touch you ?** Vasu asked. **You are welcome my friend. But be gentle. You may break my fruiting body. So this is not you?** Vasu was amazed. **What you see as an umbrella is my fruiting body. My mycelia or root like structures are within this rotten log of wood. I am carrying spores in these fruiting bodies. Spores are like seeds of plants, which are capable of growing to new ones if it falls on the ground. You sound like a plant in many ways but still you are not a plant. Is it not amazing? We are mainly made up of a material called chitin and plants are made up of cellulose. Plants also have chlorophyll in them, which make them green. We do not have chlorophyll. I am a rich source of protein and vitamins. Humans love to cook us and eat. But they need to be little bit careful while eating wild mushrooms. Some of us are highly poisonous. For example, my friend Amanita is highly toxic and has a toxin called amanitin, which can kill any one who eat it. OH-Oho** Vasu withdrew his hand. **Don't be afraid, Vasu. If you want to know more about us you may please ask a mycologist.** Agarics said. **Who is a mycologist?** Vasu asked. **Mycologist is a**

person who studies about fungi. Vasu was feeling hungry. It is time to go. **It was nice meeting you Vasu.** The little umbrella said. Vasu took care not to break any of the fruiting bodies of the mushrooms while walking. I will have a mushroom pizza for breakfast, Vasu thought.

* * *

Vasu Meets Fireflies

Vasu monkey 's long walk through the Dhandaka forest was interrupted by a sudden out pour of rain. He was on the way back to home after a visit to his uncle's place on the hills. He took shelter under a tree. Vasu wished that the rain may stop so that he could reach home before is too dark. He was tired. He could not find many animals on the way. All the birds might have reached their nests. Monkeys may be already sleeping. Vasu was worried. Mama may be looking down from their tree house for Vasu. When the skies stopped raining Vasu started walking. He was greeted by the creaking sounds of the crickets. He saw the little crickets hiding under the leaves, which were bend on breaking the silence of the wood. The frogs with their "cook croaks" joined them. Occasionally some sleepless donkeys and jackals joined the chorus, disturbing the sleep of the animals. You people think you are great singers. Vasu murmured. Oom ... Who is that? Vasu asked. It is I. It was an owl. He was sitting on a tree with his eyes full open. Not yet time for sleep? Vasu asked. Nop, not until the daybreak. He said. Vasu continued walking, hopping and jumping...

He saw some snakes slowly moving out in search of preys. When the snakes reached near, the smart frogies stopped their singing.

He crossed the hills and headed towards the valley. A slowly moving cloud in the sky hid the moon making it pitch dark. Vasu was afraid and looked forward to the moving away of the clouds but continued his journey. It looked that most of the trees had eyes.

To Vasu 's relief it was the owls and other birds that preferred keeping awake instead of sleeping. Many of them were having their late night dinner. At a distance Vasu noticed a patch of light. It looked as if a portion of the sky has fallen to the earth. The starry patch of the sky was lying under a tree. Vasu walked towards that. He was amused to see the reality when he reached there.

It was not a piece of the sky. It was a bunch of beetles sitting under a tree. They were carrying torchlights and kept on flashing beautiful green lights. When Vasu reached near they stopped flashing. Hello, why did you switch off your lights? Vasu asked. The beetles laughed and resumed their flashing. Thank you. It is too dark over here. Thanks for the light. All the beetles had torchlights with them. They were all males. Soon they were joined by a group of female beetles. How could they locate you people? Vasu asked to one of the beetles. They know that we are here, because of the lights we flash. He said. All the female fireflies know that. Are you a fly? Vasu was confused. We are called fireflies, but we are not flies. We are beetles. The firefly said.

Do you always carry fire? Vasu was curious. The light comes from our lower abdomen. Vasu saw beautiful light coming from the bellies of the fireflies. Don't be affraid. It is cool. It is not hot like fire. It will not hurt you. The fireflies turned upside down to show their glowing bellies. How do you make this light? Do you need to change the cells frequently? No. We have a stuff named luciferase, which will react with a chemical called Luciferin. This reaction will produce oxyluciferin and light. All the fireflies started flashing their lights to entertain vasu. Yet another bunch of female flies reached there. Stop flashing your lights, lest all the female fireflies may reach here. Vasu said. How come you are still awake? One of the fireflies asked. I am on my way back home. It is too dark to see the way. Vasu said. May be we could help said the nice fireflies. We will come with you. Thank you if it is of no trouble. Vasu said politely. The fireflies started flying in front of Vasu, illuminating the forest path with their green light. It was a long way. Vasu safely reached his home with the help of the fireflies. Mama was happy to see him. Vasu thanked the fireflies. Remember that we are there always, in case you loose your way in the dark. The nice fireflies assured Vasu and said bye.

* * *



**D. Y. PATIL
EDUCATION SOCIETY**
INSTITUTION DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR